



Immigration Services Division

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San Jose Selected for Customer Service Pilot

On April 7, 1999, INS Commissioner Doris Meissner announced that the agency has selected San Jose, home to one of the nation's fastest growing immigrant communities, as the site for an innovative two-year pilot in customer service.

Based on comments by INS' customers and input from all members of the San Jose pilot project team, the goal of the San Jose pilot is to change the public's perception of our ability to provide service, and regain its trust and confidence by:

- Modifying existing practices and procedures that INS uses to serve its customers;
- Field testing customer service practices for national application;
- Reducing processing times for naturalization applications, correspondence, and requests for information; and
- Establishing an environment in San Jose where outside groups and the INS are continually engaged in a dialogue on ways to improve service delivery, including problem resolution.

The strategy to achieve these goals will be based on integrating four elements: "foundation" improvements that have been articulated as part of the Commissioner's vision; organizational changes within the San Jose sub-office; information-related customer service

initiatives; and naturalization backlog reduction efforts. Future editions of NatzNews will include articles on each of these areas.

Underlying this effort are two fundamental ideas. The first is the need to measure results. The INS will accomplish this using the Common Management Information System (CMIS) and customer surveys, and continued monitoring of naturalization backlog reduction. Members of the pilot team were in San Jose during the week of April 12 establishing customer service baselines against which the agency can measure future performance. The INS will perform an independent assessment of the pilot.

Second, the success of the pilot is dependent upon strong working relationships among INS management, employees, community-based organizations (CBOs), applicants, attorneys, unions, and other customers. The INS believes that the Customer Advisory Board, which will draw its members from Congressional staff, CBOs, and attorneys, and the selection of a Customer Service Manager will promote a strong relationship with our customers and help ensure that the agency meets their needs.

The groundwork for the pilot is already being laid with the arrival of new resources including (in the 4th Quarter) doubling the number of Immigration Information Officers available to staff a mobile information unit and handle in-person inquiries. In addition, the office is in the process of hiring 13 new adjudications

officers and has recently hired 10 contract clerks, all of whom will be dedicated to reducing the backlog of citizenship cases.

Other tangible improvements include: installation of an x-ray machine and magnetometer at the entrance of the office to provide greater security for customers without the inconvenience of wandering; expansion of the information triage area to provide more efficient service; approval for build-out of a community room and adjudications space; delivery of change management support and training; and establishment and first meeting of the Customer Advisory Board.

Proven successes from the private sector such as organizational changes, expanded outreach, and a customer service board will complement current initiatives, allowing San Jose to provide high levels of service to its customers. The INS is building on current initiatives to: support CLAIMS 4 processing; establish a telephone line offering toll-free, live assistance; develop a local web page for the sub-office; and conduct complete file reviews to reduce the number of cases continued due to lack of documentation and, consequently, reduce the processing time for some cases.

Monthly updates on the pilot will appear in subsequent editions of NatzNews.

Children's Guide to Naturalization

Second graders at the R.E. Baker Elementary School of Bentonville, Arkansas have written and illustrated a delightful and informative book for children of immigrant parents called *How to Become an American Citizen*.

In a letter to the INS, teachers from the school said they wanted to reach the children of immigrant families and help them understand

how their parents will become American citizens. The teachers decided that the best way to do so would be through a "child friendly" book that could be given to the children.

Based on *A Guide to Naturalization*, the book encourages children and their parents to learn more about the United States by combining information on becoming a citizen with depictions of U.S. history, symbols, and culture. Entirely hand-drawn and colored, the book includes pictures of the flag, an eagle, the Liberty Bell, and the Statue of Liberty and depicts the freedoms and privileges of being a U.S. citizen as seen through the eyes of a second grader.

The INS will post the handbook on its website so children and grownups alike can have access to this educational and entertaining book.

97% of Respondents Rate *A Guide to Naturalization* Very Helpful or Helpful

Between January and early March, the INS received 1,716 responses from survey cards that were distributed with the new *Guide to Naturalization*. The cards prompted readers to assess the *Guide's* usefulness, as well as rate the efficacy of the Eligibility Worksheet, which assists applicants to determine if they are eligible for naturalization. Most of the responses were generated from areas with high immigrant concentrations such as Florida, New York, New Jersey and California. Of the total postcards received, a large majority of the respondents, approximately 72%, characterized the *Guide* as "very helpful," while 25% rated it "helpful."

When asked to rate the effectiveness of the Eligibility Worksheet, 58% of the respondents indicated that it was "very helpful" and 33% found it "helpful." Respondents also had the opportunity to express additional comments about the *Guide*, the naturalization process, and the INS itself. A number of those surveyed

praised the INS for its initiative in creating the *Guide* and saw its publication as a sign of the agency's commitment to improve customer service and reduce the backlog of naturalization applications.

Form N-400 Available Electronically

To promote faster, more efficient forms processing, the INS has developed an electronic version of the Form N-400, Application for Naturalization, which applicants may access via the Internet beginning May 1, 1999. The electronic version offers a major improvement over the traditional paper application: it captures key applicant data on a two-dimensional (2D) bar code that is printed on the application. The bar code can be scanned to automatically record the data, ensuring better data entry accuracy and speed.

Applicants can find the electronic application on the INS website at <http://www.ins.usdoj.gov> as of May 1st. User-friendly software guides applicants to fill in mandatory fields of information. When the form is completed, the applicant prints the form, signs it, and mails it to the appropriate INS Service Center with the appropriate fee.

At the Service Centers, data entry clerks use a scanning wand (similar to those used in grocery stores) to scan the 2D bar code printed on the form, automatically entering applicant data into CLAIMS 4.

The INS has been working with CBOs to pilot this new technology in approximately 15 locations nationwide. In some sites, Service Center employees have documented that a bar-coded Form N-400 can be entered into the system in half the time it takes to enter a traditional paper form.

INS Partners with Selective Service System

In partnership with the Selective Service System (SSS), the INS is encouraging all immigrants (and non-immigrants required by law) to register timely for selective service. As part of the agency's partnership with SSS, INS has committed to making selective service registration cards available to applicants for immigration benefits as INS offices are often the first contact an immigrant has with the U.S. government.

All INS field offices have been instructed to order registration cards directly from the SSS and to make the cards available in field offices and through their outreach efforts. In the near future, Immigration Services Division (ISD) will issue further guidance for offices.

The agency has created a link from the INS webpage, naturalization and forms sections, to a special section of SSS' webpage, established particularly for INS referred customers. By clicking this link, INS' customers can register on-line for selective service. INS' webpage is at <http://www.ins.usdoj.gov> and the SSS' webpage is at <http://www.sss.gov>.

INS Implements New Guidance on Form N-648

To promote fairness and consistency in the adjudication of naturalization cases of applicants with disabilities, the INS has provided its field offices with comprehensive policy guidance for the review of Form N-648, Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions. The guidance, developed with the input of CBOs, will enhance the ability of INS adjudicators to properly examine medical waiver forms by clarifying issues that may have been confusing and complex.

“This is a step forward for INS as we continue to find new ways to address some of the more complex citizenship cases in a more timely and customer-oriented manner,” said INS Commissioner Doris Meissner. “The new policy guidance will improve our ability to make fair, compassionate and consistent decisions on the citizenship applications of persons with disabilities.”

On March 19, 1997, the INS published a final rule in the *Federal Register* that exempts persons with disabilities from the English and civics requirements for naturalization, if they have a “medically determinable” physical or developmental disability and/or mental impairment that prevents them from meeting these requirements. The new guidance highlights and clarifies issues such as:

- Medical Certification;
- INS Review of Medical Certification;
- Timeliness of the Form N-648;
- Interview Process;
- Accommodations for the Oath of Allegiance;
- Other Reasonable Accommodations and Modifications;
- Denials of Disability Cases; and
- Examples of insufficient and sufficient responses to question 3 (findings and medical opinion) on the Form N-648.

INS Conducts “No Notice” Audits

In an effort to assist INS’ field sites in monitoring their compliance to the National Quality Procedures (NQP), CENCOR, INS’ internal quality assurance contractor, will complete its nationwide conduct of Quality Assurance Site Reviews in April. These reviews are conducted with limited prior notice to the office so that CENCOR can best assess actual daily naturalization operations and to ensure that the highest level of quality is being maintained.

The analysts have been reviewing cases in different stages of the naturalization process: cases scheduled for interview; cases continued, granted, or denied; and cases oathed but not yet closed out. The reviewers are also helping to ensure that the offices’ quality files are as complete as possible.

CENCOR and/or the Office of Internal Audit will conduct follow-up visits to those offices initially found noncompliant to help ensure corrective actions are taken to achieve compliance.

Next CBO Meeting

The next INS/CBO meeting will be May 18, 1999, at 2:00 p.m. in the Shaughnessy Conference Room on the 6th floor at the main INS building (425 “I” Street, NW, Washington, DC).

Organizations that would like to send representatives to the monthly meetings should fax their request to Patricia Stivala, ISD, at 202/514-8853.